

# Tips for Educators

## Responding to Teen Dating Violence

### How to Start the Dialogue: Developing Healthy Relationships:

- **Keep an open environment** – Be available to listen and provide opportunities for discussion. If it's hard for you to talk about, imagine how scared he/she might be.
- **Teach assertiveness, not aggressiveness** – Conflict is inevitable, so encourage empowerment and good boundaries.
- **Understand the questions and answer them honestly** – Make sure your conversations meet the goals of the students, not just your goals as the educator/adult. Honest answers are important. You aren't doing any favors by withholding the facts.
- **Talk about the facts and myths (good and bad) of dating relationships** – Teens shouldn't feel apprehensive about dating by knowing the facts. Be honest about the topic so that their confusion is reduced and they're ready for a healthy part of adolescent development.
- **Emphasize a culture of respect and equality** – Create a school environment of mutual respect, equality for everyone, and problem solving/conflict resolution. Make sure it is known that violence and disrespect will not be tolerated.
- **Assess your own values** – Make sure that you are in a place to be non-judgmental and open. Don't let your beliefs get in the way of helping a teen at risk.
- **Give your undivided attention** – When the opportunity presents itself, focus your energy and attention on the teen's needs.
- **Talk often** – The more dating violence is discussed, the easier it is for a teen to talk about it. Incorporate the concepts of equality, cultural violence and abuse whenever it makes sense in order to remove the stigma.
- **Talk with teens on their level** – Be willing to use examples/refer to what they know (i.e. current media, books, music) and even use yourself. Show them that you can connect and understand.
- **Training and education** – Make sure that you and the entire school staff are aware/educated on the issues, and be prepared beforehand so that you will be ready to respond safely and appropriately. Awareness-raising should be on-going.

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### What to Do if a Teen Discloses an Abusive Relationship

- Remain calm
- Discuss CONFIDENTIALITY and its limitations
- LISTEN and BELIEVE – this may be the first time that he/she has ever told anyone
- Remember that he/she will be affected by your reactions – this can determine if he/she opens up more or shuts down
- Be aware of the school's response policy and be honest with him/her
- Focus on the needs that he/she describes
- Provide referrals to area service providers (see teen committee list and resources)

# Tips for Educators (cont.)

## Responding to Teen Dating Violence

### What to Do if a Teen Discloses an Abusive Relationship (cont.)

- Avoid judgment or making assumptions
- Validate that student's experiences, reassure him/her that the abuse is not his/her fault and confirm that he/she did the right thing by coming to an adult to share the painful secret
- Allow him/her to guide the conversation – remember that silence is okay
- Encourage the teen to use his/her own resources for support (family, friends, teachers, counselors, coaches)
- Explore options to address the situation (victim services – both mental and physical health, legal system, school involvement)

### Do's and Don'ts with Teens: Positive and Negative Responses:

#### Positive Responses

- “Nothing that you did, or didn't do, makes it okay for someone to hurt you” (validate and believe, provide support)
- “He/she is responsible for this, not you...” (hold the abusive partner accountable)
- “I am glad that you told me. You did the right thing.”
- “What can I do to help? How can I help you feel safer?”
- “If you need some time to sit and think for a second, that's fine.” (silence is okay – give her/him time to process)
- “I am proud of you for speaking out. You are so strong/brave.” (empower, strengthen)
- “It is okay to cry. It is okay to feel sad/angry/scared.” (encourage expression or feelings and emotional responses)
- “I am here to support you. You know what's best for you and it's my job to help.” (make decisions together and empower rather than assert authority)
- “What I can do is...What I can't do is...Our school policy is...” (be open and honest about your role)

#### Negative Responses

- “This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't...” or “Why didn't you...” (victim blaming, making assumptions)
- “There's no way that he/she would...I don't believe you.” (denial)
- “Well at least he/she didn't...It doesn't sound that bad.” (minimize)
- “This sounds like a private matter. I have to call your parents to help you.”
- “I promise this will never happen again. I will make sure of it.” (DO NOT make false promises, even if you mean well)
- “Just forget it ever happened. You have to figure out a way to make this work.” (disregarding the abuse)
- “This is all my fault/your parent's fault. How could no one have seen this?” (hold abusive partner accountable)
- “What a jerk! How could he/she do that to you?” (don't badmouth the abusive partner – this student cares very much and is dealing with the conflicted emotions)
- “You have to call the police. You have to tell your parents. You have to go to the hospital.” (threatening or coercing victim to take certain steps is disempowering)